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Subject: Fw: FYI for review - with revisions

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cc	
Subject	FYI for review - with revisions

NEW BEDFORD — Right now, the ongoing Superfund cleanup of PCBs and other industrial contaminants in New Bedford Harbor is projected to take 37 years and cost $555 million — not taking into account inflation or other potential impediments.

But city officials — with qualified support of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency — are promoting a major shift in the technology of the cleanup to potentially cut hundreds of millions of dollars and save decades.

In addition, officials said Thursday, by shifting technologies two valuable pieces of property being used by EPA would be returned to the city for development.

Mayor Scott W. Lang has been the primary force in trying to bring about the change, officials said, and the mayor continues to push the process along.

The EPA now is spending $15 million a year — 90 percent federal and 10 percent state money — to suck contaminated sediment off the bottom of the harbor, sort and filter it and send clean material back into the harbor and package the contaminated material in special containers that are shipped by rail cars to a PCB disposal facility in Michigan. On the current schedule and budget, the

project will take 37 years to complete.

Instead, the city is pushing to have EPA switch to a process known as confined aquatic disposal. CAD cells are giant pits dug in the harbor bottom into which polluted materials are dumped and then covered. CAD cell disposal has been successful in a number of New England harbors, including Boston and Providence, and is underway in New Bedford Harbor for navigational dredging — a project that does not involve serious toxic contamination.

City officials believe CAD cell technology can be used for the Superfund cleanup, dramatically reducing the cost and time and increasing safety and public health.

The EPA has responded largely favorably to the proposed change, and officials from New Bedford and the EPA describe theirs as a cooperative relationship.

The EPA stopped short of endorsing the process, however, because disposing of PCBs — which are polychlorinated byphenyls used in manufacturing before being banned for health reasons — have not traditionally been disposed of in CAD cells.

The EPA has to put the idea through an "evaluation process" and a "public process" before it can publicly commit to it, officials said. The evaluation process is underway.

In the meantime, people interested in New Bedford Harbor can learn about the status of the Superfund cleanup and CAD cell technology in public meetings. EPA officials discussed the possibility of using new technology at a meeting last summer. Another joint EPA-city public meeting is scheduled Oct. 30 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the New Bedford Free Public Library.

Jeanethe Falvey, EPA spokeswoman for New England, said a major reason for the decades-long plan for the Superfund cleanup in the harbor was a cut in EPA funding years ago from an originally projected $80 million a year to $15 million a year. That stretched the project from about a decade to four decades.

Now, "It is really nice to have the players in agreement," Ms. Falvey said of the EPA and city officials. "The only reason we have hesitated" on CAD cell technology for disposal, she said, is "We want to make sure we have public support for a new procedure for Superfund material."

Ms. Falvey described the current process as using a "dredge-like vacuum, with big pipes along the harbor bottom" sending material through an underwater pipeline to a de-sanding facility where the coarser sand is separated from the silt. Because the PCBs "like to stick to the silt," the silt is sent from the de-sanding facility to a de-watering facility where the water is squeezed out, cleaned and pumped back into harbor. The PCB-contaminated "filter cake" material is stockpiled, put in containers and shipped to Michigan where it is buried in a certified PCB disposal facility.

Ms. Falvey described CAD cell technology as involving digging a deep hole in the harbor bottom, placing the contaminated material into it and covering it with a layer of non-contaminated material. An important point, Ms. Falvey said, is that the CAD cell is left with a concave top — like a hollow dish. That is intended to have the water action in the harbor continuously fill in the top of the CAD cell providing more additional clean fill as time goes on. Ms. Falvey said that provides an ongoing process of adding cover to the CAD cell.

David Dickerson, co-project manager for the EPA New England region, said the potential savings could be very large, but the time saved might be only 15 years depending on a number of factors. Mr. Dickerson said the EPA "does not want to be presumptive" about the CAD cell technology or benefits and will move along at a measured pace. "We need to dot the i's and cross the t's. We want to be as transparent as we can," he said.

Port Director Kristin Decas said New Bedford — similar to most ports in the U.S. — is always looking for ways to make more waterfront space available for expansion. She said by getting the EPA to switch technology on the cleanup, the EPA would move operations off sites on the Upper Harbor above Fairhaven Mills and on the working waterfront above Route 6 and below Interstate 195.

The site above Fairhaven Mills could then be used for development, waterfront access and tied to a larger-scale development project planned in the area, Ms. Decas said. The working waterfront site has bulkheads and rail and would make an ideal inter modal transportation center, Ms. Decas said. "These are tremendous assets that could come on line" for the city," she said.

Mayor Lang said when the city gave the EPA a decades-long lease on property it is using for the Superfund cleanup, it "did not have a vision for Fairhaven Mills and riverfront development. The EPA is sitting in areas that are extremely important to the city. There is no need for land-based, outdated technology. We need to begin thinking about economic development on the land."

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